

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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ANDRUS ASKS CONGRESS TO ACT QUICKLY ON ALASKA LANDS LEGISLATION

Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus today urged the Congress to act quickly to complete its unfinished business and establish new national parks, wildlife refuges, wild and scenic rivers and forest areas in Alaska.

"The promise of the Alaska lands legislation held out to the American people has always been that whole ecosystems would be preserved, that the land management errors of the lower 48 states would not be repeated," Andrus told the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee.

Andrus urged the Committee to scrutinize weakening amendments being proposed to the legislation. "The burden of proof must rest with those who want to use the federal lands for private economic gain to demonstrate the need--beyond any question--for weakening amendments," he said.

"I urge each member of this Committee to inquire beyond the irresponsible charges of 'lockup' and determine for himself which individual or which company will profit from a particular amendment, and ask the question, is there an alternative," Andrus said.

"For a miner or a trophy guide or a timber company, there are alternatives. For the brown bear, the caribou and for all the people who depend on these resources, there are no alternatives," he said.

Congress began intensive consideration of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act in 1977. At that time, Andrus stated that passage of the legislation was the Carter Administration's highest environmental priority and urged Congress to protect the "crown jewels" of Alaska--its most spectacular natural environments, recreation areas and wildlife habitats.

After overwhelmingly passing the House, the legislation died in the Senate. Because the protective land withdrawals expired on December 16, 1978, in November Andrus used his authority to withdraw for three years all the lands being considered for designation as conservation units by Congress some 110 million acres. On December first, the President designated some 56 million acres of these areas as 17 national monuments, a permanent form of protection.

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